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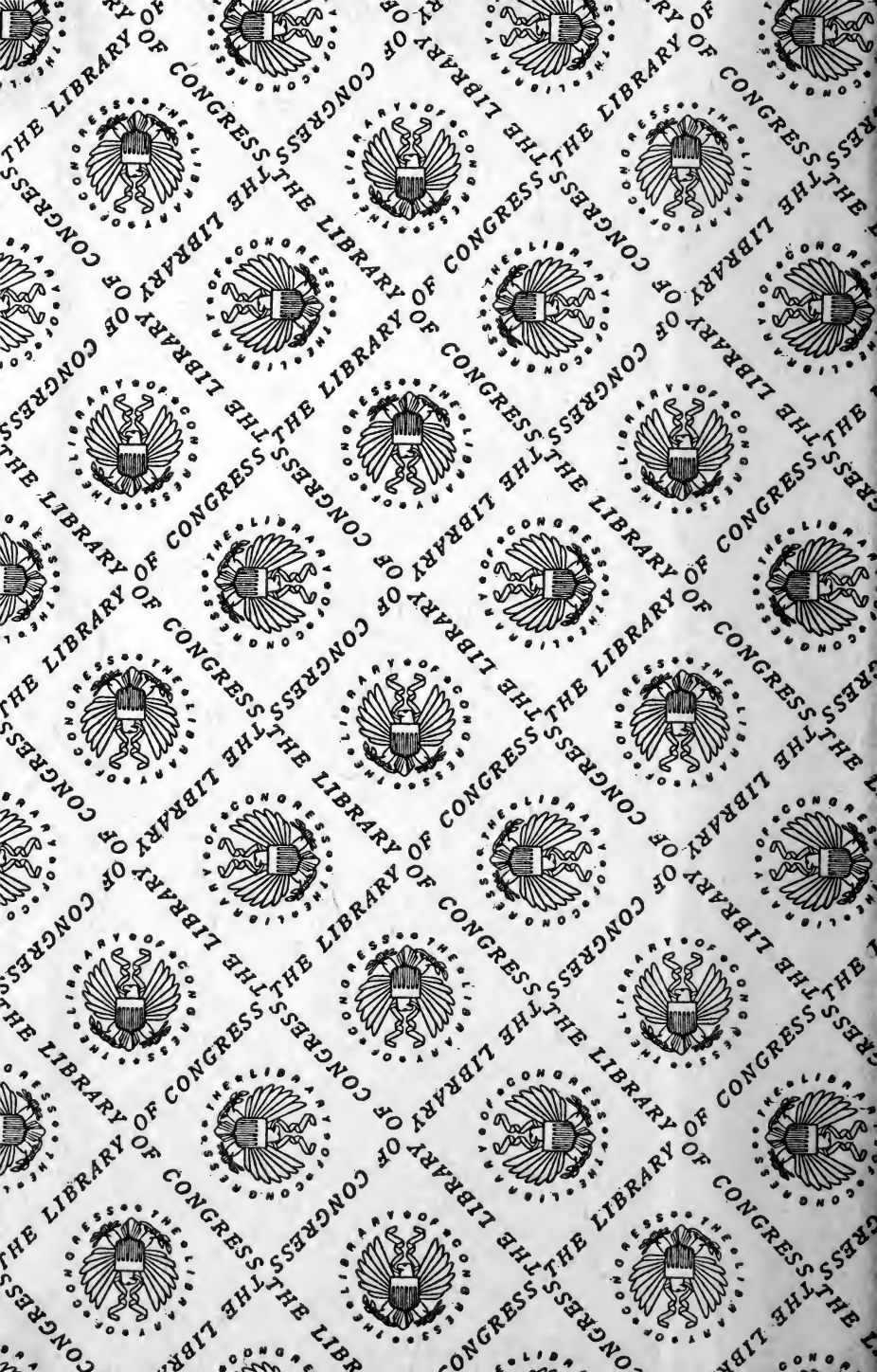
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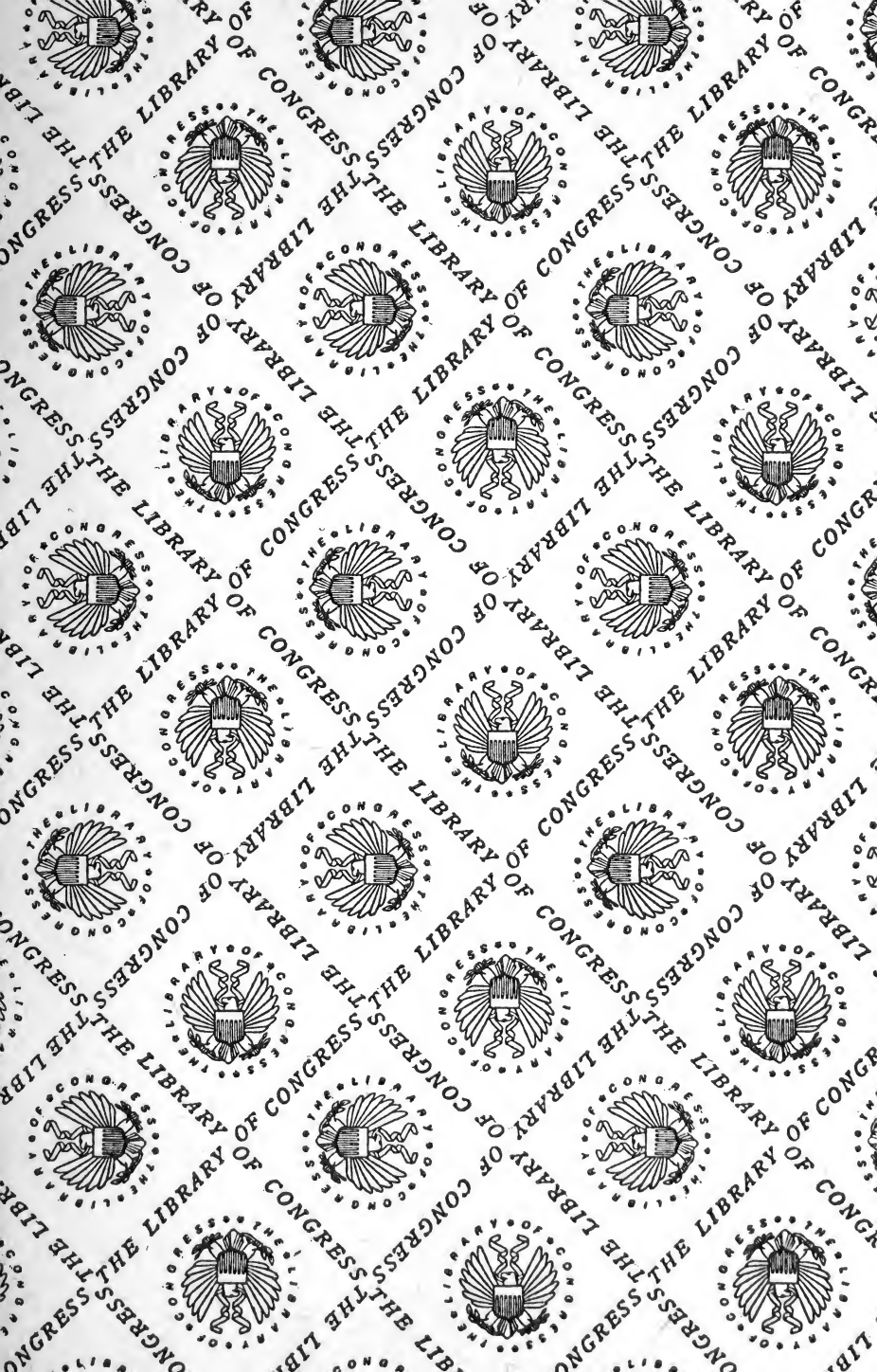
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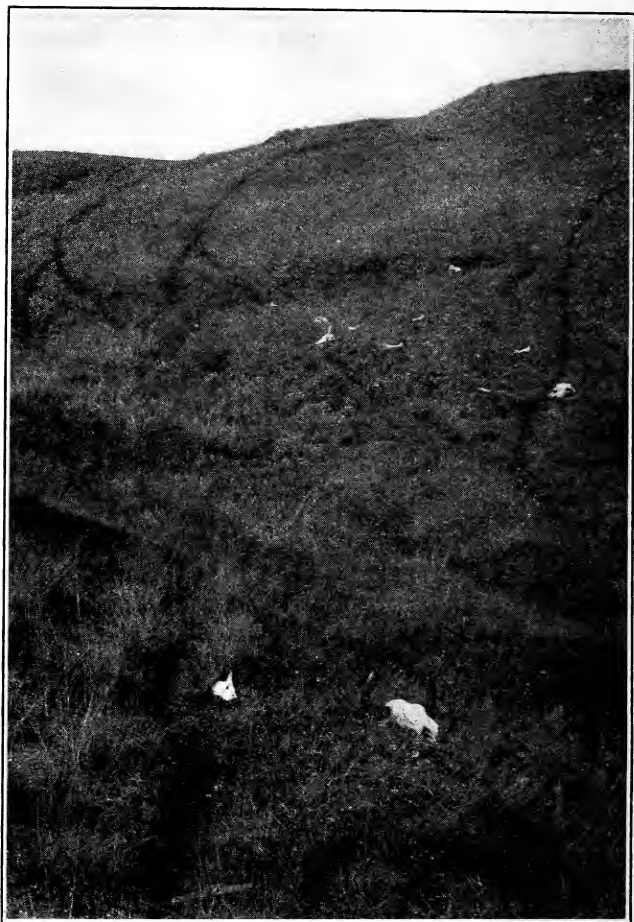
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*Deeply the buffalo trod it,
Beating it barren as brass;
Now the soft rain-fingers sod it,
Green to the crest of the pass.
Backward it slopes into history;
Forward it lifts into mystery.
Here is but wind in the grass.*
The Buffalo Trail, page 62

GRASS-GROWN TRAILS

Charles
By ¹BADGER CLARK, *Author of*
"SUN AND SADDLE LEATHER"

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS BY
L. A. HUFFMAN



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CONTENTS

	PAGE
The Coyote	9
The Free Wind	10
The Medicine Man	12
The Piano at Red's	14
A Ranger	16
On the Drive	19
Saturday Night	21
Southwestern June	22
The Night Herder	24
Hawse Work	26
Half-Breed	28
To Her	29
The Locoed Horse	30
The Long Way	32
Freightin'	34
The Rains	37
The Border	40
The Bad Lands	43
The Springtime Plains	45
On the Oregon Trail	46
The Forest Rangers	48
The Yellow Stuff	49
The Sheep-Herder	51

CONTENTS

	AGE
The Old Prospector	55
God of the Open	57
The Passing of the Trail	58
Latigo Town	60
The Buffalo Trail	62
The Camp Fire's Song	63

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

<i>Deeply the buffalo trod it, Beating it barren as brass; Now the soft rain-fingers sod it, Green to the crest of the pass. Backward it slopes into history; Forward it lifts into mystery. Here is but wind in the grass.—Frontispiece.</i>	
<i>For the wind, the wind, the good free wind, She sang from the pine divide That the sky was blue and the young years few And the world was big and wide!</i>	FACING PAGE 10
<i>Some dream ahead to pastures green, Some stare ahead to slaughter, But, anyway, night drops between And brings us rest and water.</i>	20
<i>Sing me the song of the buffalo run To the edge of the canyon snare, With the roaring plunge when the meat was won And the flash of knives in the low red sun And the good blood smell in the air.</i>	28

<i>Forty miles from Taggart's store, Fifty yet to grind, Heavin' six strung out before, Trailer snubbed behind; Half a world of glarin' sand Prayin' for a tree, Nothin' movin' 'cross the land But the sun and me.</i>	34
<i>No fresh green things in the Bad Lands bide; It is all stark red and gray, And strewn with bones that had lived and died Ere the first man saw the day.</i>	44
<i>A-a! ma-a! ba-a! eh-eh-eh! My woollies greasy gray.</i>	52
<i>Latigo Town, ay, Latigo Town, Child of the mesa sun-flooded and brown.</i>	60

GRASS GROWN TRAILS



THE COYOTE

Trailing the last gleam after,
In the valleys emptied of light,
Ripples a whimsical laughter
Under the wings of the night.
Mocking the faded west airily,
Meeting the little bats merrily,
Over the mesas it shrills
To the red moon on the hills.

Mournfully rising and waning,
Far through the moon-silvered land
Wails a weird voice of complaining
Over the thorns and the sand.
Out of blue silences eerily.
On to the black mountains wearily,
Till the dim desert is crossed,
Wanders the cry, and is lost.

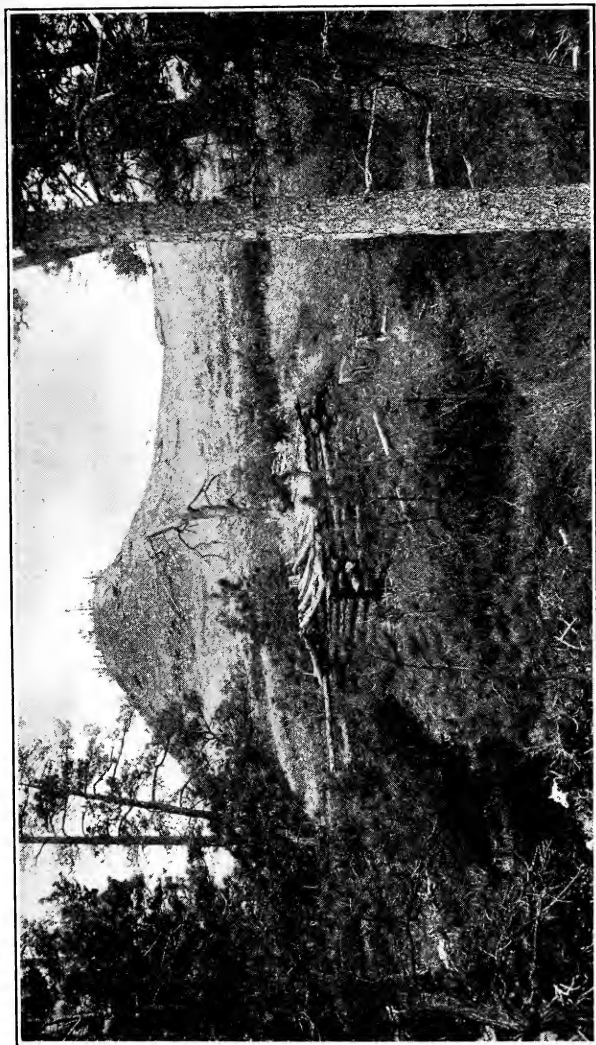
Here by the fire's ruddy streamers,
Tired with our hopes and our fears,
We inarticulate dreamers
Hark to the song of our years.
Up to the brooding divinity
Far in that sparkling infinity
Cry our despair and delight,
Voice of the Western night!

THE FREE WIND

I went and worked in a drippin' mine
 'Mong the rock and the oozin' wood,
For the dark seemed lit with a dollar sign
 And they told me money's good.
So I jumped and sweat for a flat-foot boss
 Till my pocket bulged with pay,
But my heart it fought like a led bronc' hawse
 Till I flung my drill away.

For the wind, the wind, the good free wind,
 She sang from the pine divide
That the sky was blue and the young years few
 And the world was big and wide!
From the poor, bare hills all gashed with scars
 I rode till the range was crossed;
Then I watched the gold of sunset bars
And my camp-sparks glintin' toward the stars
 And laughed at the pay I'd lost.

I went and walked in the city way
 Down a glitterin' canyon street,
For the thousand lights looked good and gay
 And they said life there was sweet.
So the wimmen laughed while night reeled by
 And the wine ran red and gold,
But their laugh was the starved wolf's huntin' cry
 And their eyes were hard and old.



*For the wind, the wind, the good free wind,
She sang from the pine divide*

*That the sky was blue and the young years few
And the world was big and wide!*

And the wind, the wind, the clean free wind,
She laughed through the April rains:
"Come out and live by the wine I give
In the smell of the greenin' plains!"
And I looked back once to the smoky towers
Where my face had bleached so pale,
Then loped through the lash of drivin' showers
To the uncut sod and the prairie flowers
And the old wide life o' the trail.

I went and camped in the valley trees
Where the thick leaves whispered rest,
For love lived there 'mong the honey bees,
And they told me love was best.
There the twilight lanes were cool and dim
And the orchards pink with May,
Yet my eyes they'd lift to the valley's rim
Where the desert reached away.

And the wind, the wind, the wild free wind,
She called from the web love spun
To the unbought sand of the lone trail land
And the sweet hot kiss o' the sun!
Oh, I looked back twice to the valley lass,
Then I set my spurs and sung,
For the sun sailed up above the pass
And the mornin' wind was in the grass
And my hawse and me was young.

THE MEDICINE MAN

"The trail is long to the bison herd,
The prairie rotten with rain,
And look! the wings of the thunder bird
Blacken the hills again.
A medicine man the gods may balk—
Go fight for us with the thunder hawk!"

The medicine man flung out his arms.
"I am weary of woman talk
And cook-fire witching and childish charms!
I fight you the thunder hawk!"
Then he took his arrows and climbed the butte
While the warriors watched him, scared and mute.

A wind from the wings began to blow
And the arrows of rain to shoot,
As the medicine man raised high his bow,
Standing alone on the butte,
And the day went dark to the cowering band
As the arrow leaped from his steady hand.

For the thunder hawk swooped down to fight
And who in his way could stand?
The flash of his eye was blinding bright
And his wing-clap stunned the land.
The braves yelled terror and loosed the rain
And scattered far on the drowning plain.

So, after the thunder hawk swept by,
They found him, scorched and slain,
Yet (fighting with gods, who fears to die?)
He smiled with a light disdain.
That smile was glory to all his clan
But none dared touch the medicine man.

THE PIANO AT RED'S

'Twas a hole called Red's Saloon
In La Vaca town;
'Twas an old piano there,
Blistered, marred and brown,
And a man more battered still,
Takin' drinks for fees,
Played all night from memory
On the yellow keys.

While the glasses clinked and clashed
On the sloppy bar,
That piano's dreamy voice
Took you out and far,
Ridin' old, forgotten trails
Underneath the moon,
Till you heard a drunken yell
Back in Red's Saloon.

Whirr of wheel and slap of cards,
Talk of loss and gain,
Mixed with hum of honey bees
Down a sunny lane.
Glimpses of your mother's face,
Touch of girlish lips
Often made you lose your count
As you stacked your chips.

Scufflin' feet and thud of fists,
Curses hot as fire—
Still the music sang of love,
Longin', lost desire,
Dreams that never could have been,
Joys that couldn't stay—
While the man upon the floor
Wiped the blood away.

Then, some way, it followed you,
Slept upon your breast,
Trailed you out across the range,
Never let you rest;
And for days and days you'd hum
Just one scrap of tune—
Funny place for music, though,
Back in Red's Saloon!

A RANGER

He never made parade of tooth or claw;
He was plain as us that nursed the bawlin' herds.
Though he had a rather meanin'-lookin' jaw,
He was shy of exercisin' it with words.
As a circuit-ridin' preacher of the law,
All his preachin' was the sort that hit the nail;
He was just a common ranger, just a ridin' pilgrim
stranger,
And he labored with the sinners of the trail.

Once a Yaqui knifed a woman, jealous mad,
Then hit southward with the old, old killer's
plan,
And nobody missed the woman very bad,
While they'd just a little rather missed the man.
But the ranger crossed his trail and sniffed it glad,
And then loped away to bring him back again,
For he stood for peace and order on the lonely,
sunny border
And his business was to hunt for sinful men!

So the trail it led him southward all the day,
Through the shinin' country of the thorn and
snake,
Where the heat had drove the lizards from their
play
To the shade of rock and bush and yucca stake.

And the mountains heaved and rippled far away
And the desert broiled as on the devil's prong
But he didn't mind the devil if his head kep' clear
and level

And the hoofs beat out their quick and steady
song.

Came the yellow west, and on a faroff rise
Something black crawled up and dropped beyond
the rim,

And he reached his rifle out and rubbed his eyes
While he cussed the southern hills for growin'
dim.

Down a hazy 'royo came the coyote cries,
Like they laughed at him because he'd lost his
mark,

And the smile that brands a fighter pulled his mouth
a little tighter

As he set his spurs and rode on through the dark.

Came the moonlight on a trail that wriggled higher
Through the mountains that look into Mexico,
And the shadows strung his nerves like banjo wire
And the miles and minutes dragged unearthly
slow.

Then a black mesquit spit out a thread of fire
And the canyon walls flung thunder back again,
And he caught himself and fumbled at his rifle while
he grumbled

That his bridle arm had weight enough for ten.

Though his rifle pointed wavy-like and slack
And he grabbed for leather at his hawse's shy,
Yet he sent a soft-nosed exhortation back
That convinced the sinner—just above the eye.
So the sinner sprawled among the shadows black
While the ranger drifted north beneath the moon,
Wabblin' crazy in his saddle, workin' hard to stay
astraddle
While the hoofs beat out a slow and sorry tune.

When the sheriff got up early out of bed,
How he stared and vowed his soul a total loss,
As he saw the droopy thing all blotched with red
That came ridin' in aboard a tremblin' hawse.
But "I got 'im" was the most the ranger said
And you couldn't hire him, now, to tell the tale;
He was just a quiet ranger, just a ridin' pilgrim
stranger
And he labored with the sinners of the trail.

ON THE DRIVE

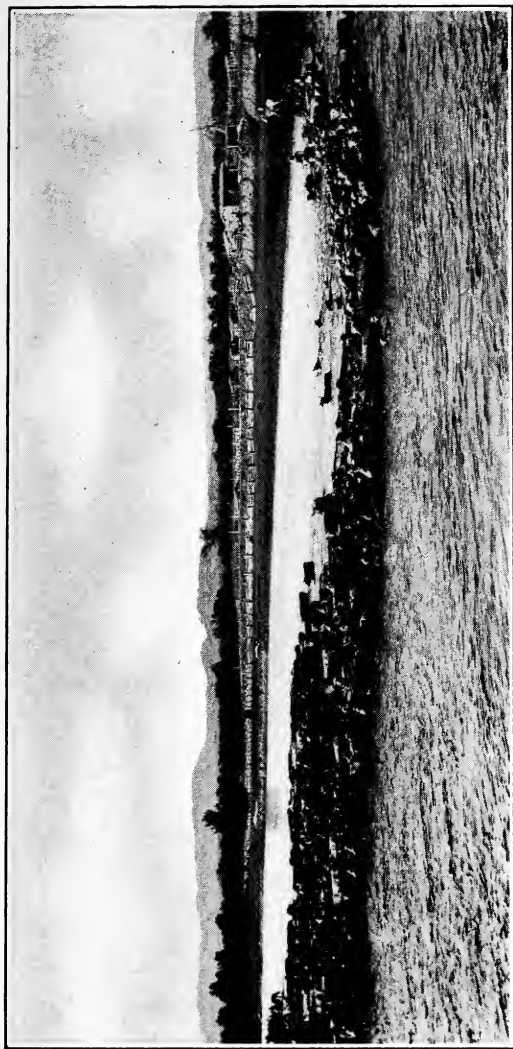
Oh, days whoop by with swingin' lope
And days slip by a-sleepin',
And days must drag, with lazy rope,
Along the trail a-creepin'.
Heeya-a! you cattle; drift away!
Heeyow! the slow hoofs sift away
And sunny dust clouds lift away,
Along the trail a-creepin'.

My pard may sing of sighin' love
And I of roarin' battle,
But all the time we sweat and shove
And follow up the cattle.
Heeya-a! the bawlin' crowd of you!
Heeyow the draggin' cloud of you!
We're glad and gay and proud of you,
We men that follow cattle!

But all the world's a movin' herd
Where men drift on together,
And some may spur and some are spurred,
But most are horns and leather!
Heeya-a! the rider sings along,
Heeyow! the reined hawse swings along
And drifts and drags and flings along
The mob of horns and leather.

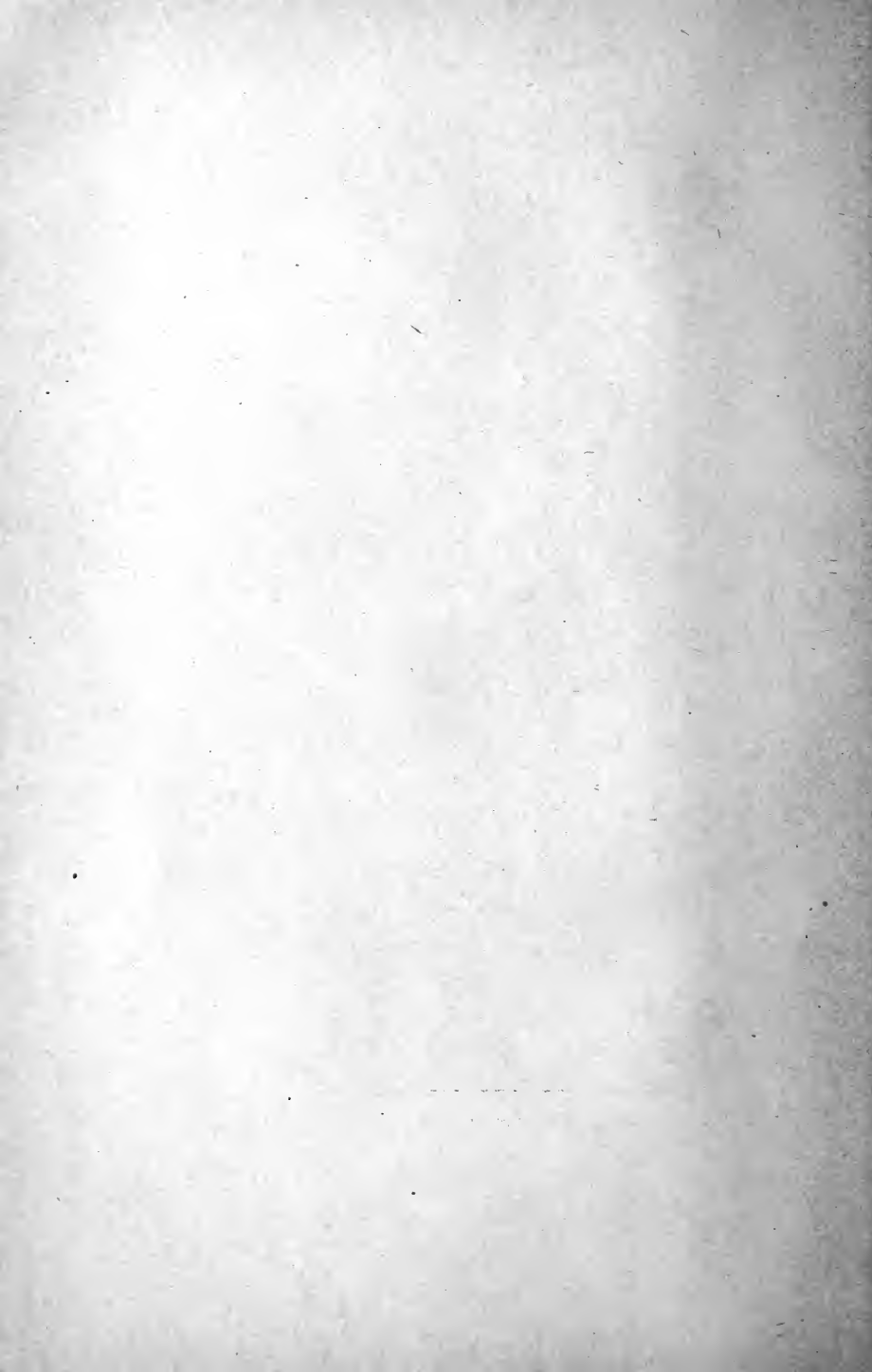
The outlaws fight to break away;
The weak and lame are crawlin',
But only dead ones quit the play,
The dust-cloud and the bawlin'.
Heeya-a! it's grief and strife to us;
Heeyow! it's child and wife to us;
By leap or limp, it's life to us;
The dust-cloud and the bawlin'.

Some dream ahead to pastures green,
Some stare ahead to slaughter,
But, anyway, night drops between
And brings us rest and water.
Heeya-a! you cattle, drift away!
Heeyow! the dust-clouds lift away;
The glarin' miles will shift away
And leave us rest and water.



*Some dream ahead to pastures green,
Some stare ahead to slaughter,*

*But, anyway, night drops between
And brings us rest and water.*



SATURDAY NIGHT

Out from the ranch on a Saturday night,
Ridin' a hawse that's a shootin' star,
Close on the flanks of the flyin' daylight,
Racin' with dark for the J L Bar.
Fox-trot and canter will do for the day;
It's a gallop, my love, when I'm ridin' your way.

Up the arroyo the trippin' hoofs beat,
Flingin' the hinderin' gravel wide;
Now your light glimmers across the mesquite,
Glimpsed from the top of a rocky divide;
Down through a draw where the shadows are gay
I'm comin', my darlin', I'm ridin' your way.

West, where the sky is a-blushin' afar,
Matchin' your cheeks as the daylight dies,
West, where the shine of a glitterin' star
Hints of the light I will find in your eyes,
Night-birds are passin' the signal to say:
"He's comin', my lady, he's ridin' your way."

Hoof-beats are measurin' seconds so fast,
Clickin' them off with an easy rhyme;
Minutes will grow into months at the last,
Mebbe to bring us a marryin' time.
Life would be singin' and work would be play
If every night I was ridin' your way.

SOUTHWESTERN JUNE

Lazy little hawse, it's noon
And we've wasted saddle leather,
But the mornin's slip so soon
When we drift around together
In this lazy, shinin' weather,
Sunny, easy-goin' June.

Who kin study shamblin' herds,
How they calve or die or wander,
When the bridegroom mockin'-birds,
Singin' here and there and yonder,
Trill that June's too bright to ponder
And life's just too fine for words!

Down the desert's hazy blue
See the tall gray whirlwinds farin',
Slow, contented sort of crew
Trailin' 'cross the sunny barren,
Headed nowhere and not carin'
Just the same as me and you.

From a world of unfenced room
Just a breath of breeze is strayin',
Triflin' with the yucca bloom
Till its waxy bells are swayin',
On my cheek warm kisses layin'
Soft as touch of ostrich plume.

When the July lightnin' gleams
This brown range will start to workin',
Hills be green and tricklin' streams
Down each deep arroyo lurkin';
Now the sleepy land is shirkin',
Drowzin', smilin' in her dreams.

Steppin' little hawse, it's noon.
Turquoise blue the far hills glimmer;
"Sun—sun—sun," the mockers croon
Where the yellow range lands shimmer,
And our sparklin' spirits simmer
For we're young yet, and it's June!

THE NIGHT HERDER

I laughed when the dawn was a-peepin'
And swore in the blaze of the noon,
But down from the stars is a-creepin'
A softer, oneasier tune.
Away, and away, and away,
The whisperin' night seems to say
Though the trail-weary cattle are sleepin'
And the desert dreams under the moon.

By day, if the roarin' herd scatters,
My heart it is steady and set,
But now, when they're quiet, it patters
Like the ball in a spinnin' roulette.
Away, and away, and away
To the rim where the heat lightnin's play—
Out there is the one trail that matters
To the valley I never forget.

There's a pass where the black shadows shiver,
Then a desert all silvery blue,
A divide, and the breaks by the river,
Then a light in the valley—and you!
Away, and away, and away—
'Tis a month till I see you by day,
But under the moon it's forever
And the weary trail winds the world through.

The coyotes are laughin' out yonder,
A happy owl whoops on the hill—
Oh, wild, lucky things that kin wander
As far and as free as they will!
Away, and away, and away,
And I that am wilder than they
Must loll in my saddle and ponder
Or sing for the cows to be still!

I see the dark river waves wrinkle;
The valley trees droop in a swoon;
You're dreamin' where valley bells tinkle
And half-asleep mockin'-birds croon.
Away, and away, and away—
Do your dainty dreams ever stray
To a camp where the desert stars twinkle
And a lone rider sings to the moon?

HAWSE WORK

Stop! there's the wild bunch to right of the trail,
Heads up and ears up and ready to sail,
Led by a mare with the green in her eyes,
Mean as the devil and nearly as wise.
Circle 'em, boys, and the pass is the place;
Settle your heels for a rowelin' race.

Oh, hawse work! the sweep and the drift of it!
Hawse work! the leap and the lift of it!
Who wants to fly in the empty blue sky
When he kin ride on the hawse work!

Ai! and they're off in a whirlwind. So!
Straight in the line we don't want 'em to go;
Light-footed, wild-hearted, look at 'em flit!
Head 'em, now! rowel, and turn loose the bit!
Whee! and the rip and the rush and the beat,
Rattlin' rocks and the whippin' mesquit!

Oh, hawse work! the swing and the swell of it!
Hawse work! the sing and the yell of it!
Holler goodbye to the dull and the dry;
Leave 'em behind on the hawse work.

Shorty is down with his hawse in a heap;
Might have pulled in for a gully so deep.
Reddy he rides like he's tired of his life;

Ought to be thinkin' he's got a wife—
Shrinkin' and thinkin' of bones that may crunch?
No! Yip! we've headed the mare and her bunch!

Oh, hawse work! the rip and the tear of it!
Hawse work! the dip and the dare of it!
Life flutters high when you're lookin' to die;
That is the fun of the hawse work.

Hi! and you're foolish for once, old lass,
Streakin' it straight for the trap in the pass.
Into the canyon the hoof-thunder drums—
Where is that holdup? Hmp! there he comes,
Crow-hoppin' down from the bluff—too late!
Damn! and they're gone for a tour of the State!

Oh, hawse work, the rant and the fuss of it!
Hawse work! the pant and the cuss of it!
Yet when I sigh and the world is a lie
Give me a day on the hawse work!

HALF-BREED

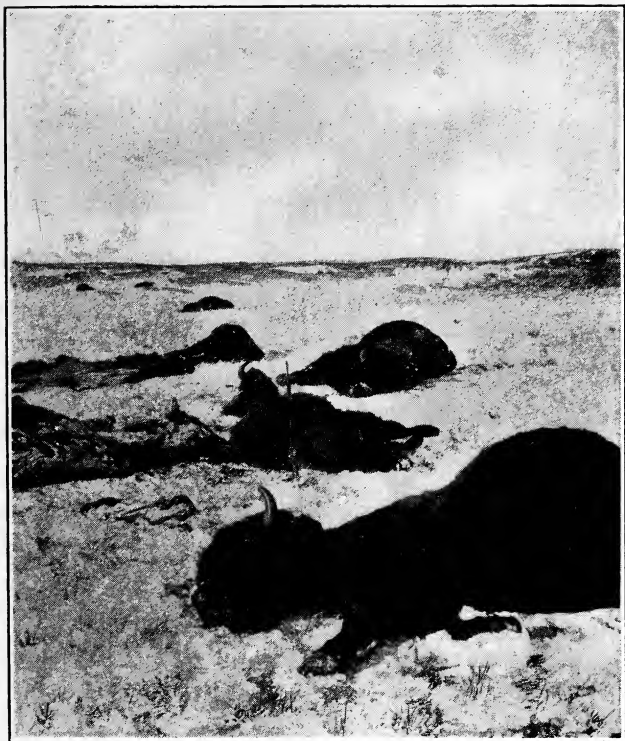
Fathers with eyes of ancient ire,
Old eagles shorn of flight,
Forget the breed of my blue-eyed sire
While I sit this hour by the council fire,
All red in the fire's red light.

Chant me the day of the war-steed's prance
And the signal fires on the buttes,
Of the Cheyenne scalps on the lifted lance,
Of the women raped from the Pawnee dance
And the wild death trail of the Utes.

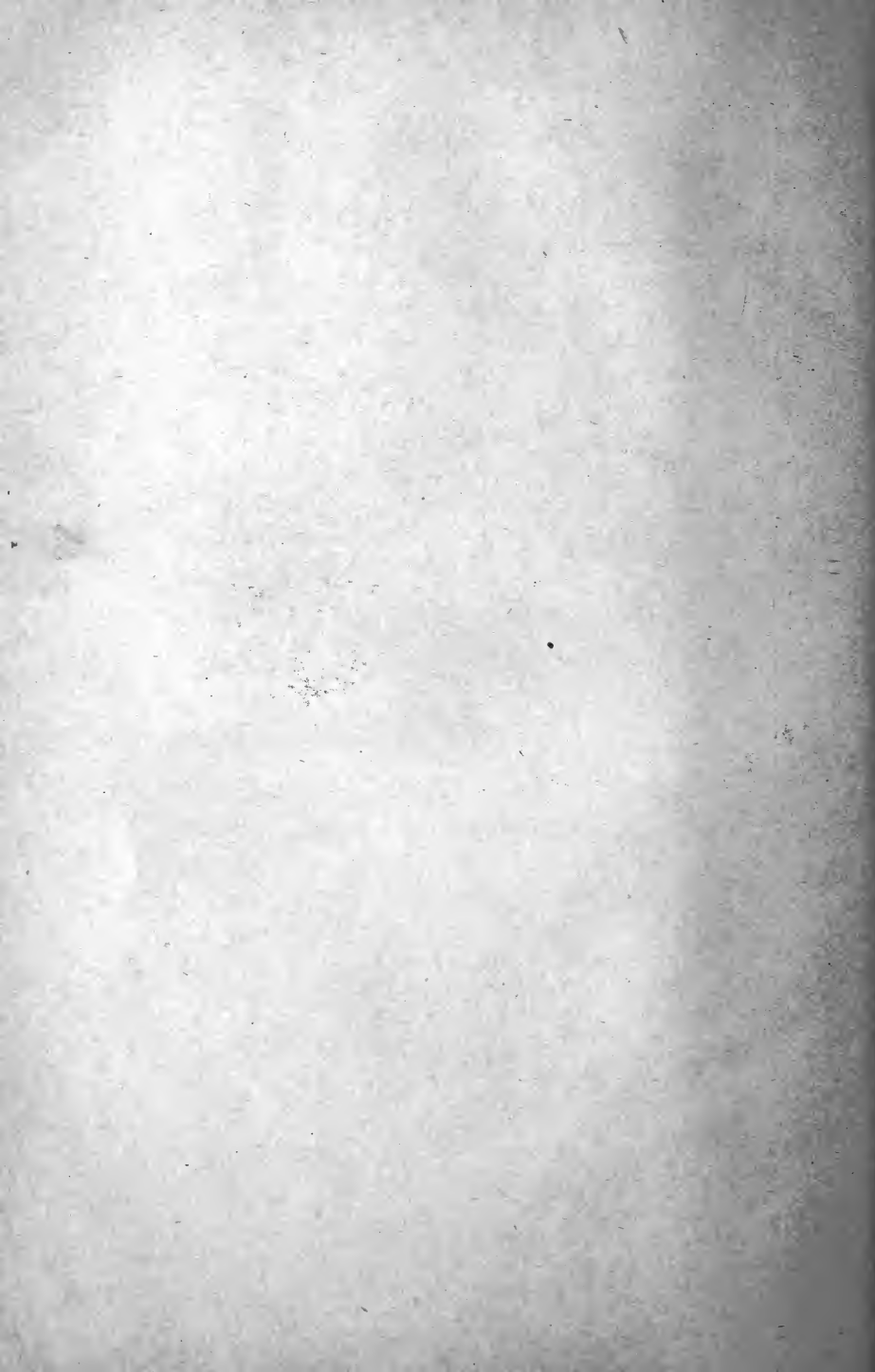
Sing me the song of the buffalo run
To the edge of the canyon snare,
With the roaring plunge when the meat was won
And the flash of knives in the low red sun
And the good blood smell in the air.

Chant me the might of the Manitou—
But the old song drags and dies.
Old things have drifted the sunset through
Till the very God of the land comes new
From the rim where the young stars rise!

Fathers, red men, the red flame falls,
And over the dim dawn lands
My white soul hunts me again and calls
To the lanes of law and the shadow of walls
And a woman with soft white hands.



*Sing me the song of the buffalo run
To the edge of the canyon snare,
With the roaring plunge when the meat was won
And the flash of knives in the low red sun
And the good blood smell in the air.*



TO HER

Cut loose a hundred rivers,
Roaring across my trail,
Swift as the lightning quivers,
Loud as a mountain gale.
I build me a boat of slivers;
I weave me a sail of fur,
And ducks may founder and die
But I

Cross that river to her!

Bunch the deserts together,
Hang three suns in the vault;
Scorch the lizards to leather,
Strangle the springs with salt.
I fly with a buzzard feather,
I dig me wells with a spur,
And snakes may famish and fry
But I

Cross that desert to her!

Murder my sleep with revel;
Make me ride through the bogs
Knee to knee with the devil,
Just ahead of the dogs.
I harrow the Bad Lands level,
I teach the tiger to purr,
For saints may wallow and lie
But I

Go clean-hearted to her!

THE LOCOED HORSE

As I was ridin' all alone
And winkin' in the noontime glare,
I seen a hawse all hide and bone
Walk 'round a willow dead and bare—
Walk 'round and 'round, with limp and groan,
And hunt the shade that wasn't there.
And then says I: "That sorry steed
Has been and et the loco weed."

Near by a spreadin' liveoak laid
Its wide, cool shadow on the ground,
But then he knowed that willow's shade
Was just a little further 'round
And reckoned, each slow step he made,
That in the next it would be found.
There, like a coon, his thoughts were treed
Since he had et the loco weed.

The water trail went windin' by,
The sweet brown grass furred every slope
And he was ga'nt and starved and dry,
Yet, on his ghostly picket rope
Led 'round and 'round, he still must try
That hopeless circle of his hope.
He didn't think of drink or feed
Since he had et the loco weed.

A playful wild bunch topped the hill
And stared with eyes all impish bright
And whinnered to him sweet and shrill,
Then flung their heads and loped from sight,
Yet from that everlastin' mill
They couldn't make him stray a mite.
He never seen their gay stampede
For he had et the loco weed.

When next that range I had to ride
Beneath his willow tree he lay,
Just wornout hoofs and faded hide
And big black birds that flapped away;
But yet I reckon that he died
Still hopeful—happy—who kin say?
Sometimes I think I mostly need
To eat some sort of loco weed.

THE LONG WAY

Two miles of ridin' from the school, without a bit
of trouble—

The main road hit her father's ranch as straight
as you could fall.

I led her by a shorter cut that made the distance
double

And guided her along a trail that wasn't there
at all.

The long way, the long way, but ridin' it together
I never cared a feather for the length and never
shall,

With happy hoofs that shuffled to the singin' saddle
leather

And laughin' wind that ruffled sunny miles of
chaparral.

The trail of our meanderin' would tire a wolf to
follow;

The range was hardly wide enough for us to go
around.

I dared to hope she liked it, bare hill and thorny
hollow,

And prayed that all her likin' wasn't wasted on
the ground.

The long way, the long way, and down the wind
we drifted,

And soon the sand was sifted in our tracks and
they were gone.

I dreamed of no forgettin' while to me her face was
lifted,

Nor knowed the sun was settin', for her eyes were
full of dawn.

Perhaps I hoped that we were lost without a trail
to guide us.

It shocked me like a bullet when the dogs began
to bark,

And suddenly, from nowhere, the ranch was there
beside us,

She reined away and left me, and the world was
in the dark.

The long way, the long way, of all my old Sep-
tembers,

Gone gray like campfire embers when the mid-
night coyote shrills,

One hour stays golden mellow—do you reckon she
remembers

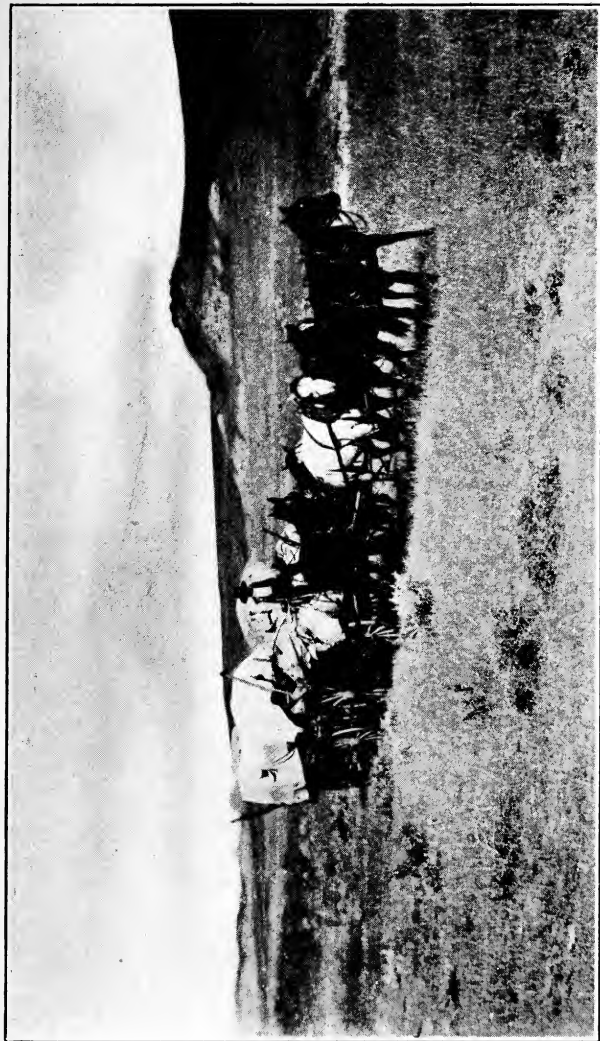
That sunset fadin' yellow through the notches
of the hills?

FREIGHTIN'

Forty miles from Taggart's store,
Fifty yet to grind,
Heavin' six strung out before,
Trailer snubbed behind;
Half a world of glarin' sand
Prayin' for a tree,
Nothin' movin' 'cross the land
But the sun and me.

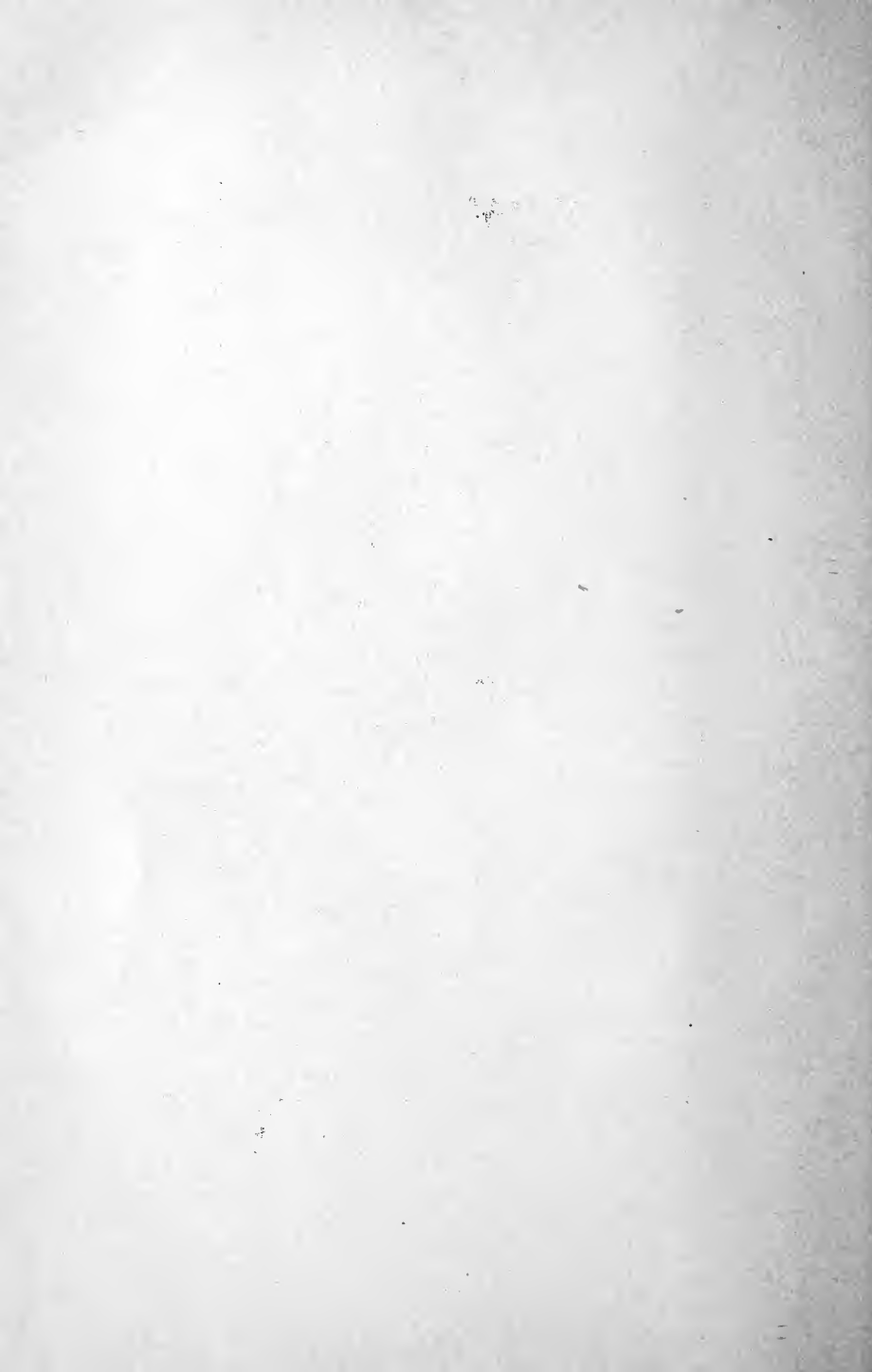
Chuck an' luck! luck an' chuck!
Grunts the workin' wheels;
Lazy gust swirls up the dust
From the hawses' heels.
I've been young and raced and sung,
But I've learnt my load.
Slow, slow, on we go
Out the stretchin' road.

Where the sky-line waves and breaks
Shines a misty beach
And the blue of ripplin' lakes—
Lakes no man kin reach.
Just beyond my leaders' bits
Winds the life I know,
Ruts and 'royos, hills and pits
In a daylong row.



*Forty miles from Taggart's store,
Fifty yet to grind,
Heavin' six strung out before,
Trailer snubbed behind;*

*Half a world of glarin' sand
Prayin' for a tree,
Nolhin' movin' 'cross the land
But the sun and me.*



Chuck an' luck! luck an' chuck!
Life's more miss than hit.
Luck's the thing I dream and sing;
Chuck is all I git!
'Neath the sky I crawl and fry
Like the horny toad.
Slow, slow, on we go
Out the stretchin' road.

When I reach that sparklin' line
Where the ripples run,
There'll be just this road of mine
And the dust and sun.
Mebbe on my last far hill,
Where the dream-mist clears,
I'll be freightin', freightin' still
Down the road of years.

Chuck an' luck! luck an' chuck!
Sky-lines mostly lie,
Yet they beat the limp mesquit
That goes trailin' by.
Luck enough to move my stuff,—
More I've never knowed.
Slow, slow, on we go
Out the stretchin' road.

Slim and far our shadow swings;
Sun is on his knees.
Some one's campin' at the springs—
Smell it down the breeze.
Chuck time, boys, and sleep besides,
When we've chomped our hay.
Durn your dusty, trusty hides!
You've sho' earned your pay.

Chuck an' luck! luck an' chuck!
Grunts the weary wheels;
Dreams untold and sunset gold,
Cussin' sweat and meals.
If you kin, Lord, let me win,
But I'll move my load.
Slow, slow, on we go
Out the stretchin' road.

THE RAINS

You've watched the ground-hog's shadow and the
shiftin' weather signs

Till the Northern prairie starred itse'f with
flowers;

You've seen the snow a-meltin' up among the
Northern pines

And the mountain creeks a-roarin' with the
showers.

You've blessed the stranger sunlight when the
Winter days were done

And the Summer creepin' down the budded lanes.

Did you ever see a Springtime in the home range
of the sun,

When the desert land is waitin' for the Rains?

The April days are sun and sun; the last thin cloud
is fled.

It's gold above the eastern mountain crest,

Then blaze upon the yellow range all day from
overhead

And then a stripe of gold across the west.

The dry wind mourns among the hills, a-huntin'
trees and grass,

Then down the desert flats it rises higher

And sweeps a rollin' dust-storm up and flings it
through the pass

And fills the evenin' west with smoulderin' fire.

It's sun and sun without a change the lazy length
o' May

And all the little sun things own the land.

The horned toad basks and swells himse'f; the bright
swifts dart and play;

The rattler hunts or dozes in the sand.

The wind comes off the desert like it brushed a
bed of coals;

The sickly range grass withers down and fails;

The bony cattle bawl around the dryin' water
holes,

Then stagger off along the stony trails.

The days crawl on to Summer suns that slower
blaze and wheel;

The mesas heave and quiver in the noon.

The mountains they are ashes and the sky is shinin'
steel,

Though the mockin'-birds are singin' that it's
June.

And here and there among the hills, a-standin' white
and tall,

The droopin' plumes of yucca flowers gleam,

The buzzards circle, circle where the starvin' cattle
fall

And the whole hot land seems dyin' in a dream.

But last across the sky-line comes a thing that's
strange and new,

A little cloud of saddle blanket size.

It blackens 'long the mountains and bulges up the
blue

And shuts the weary sun-glare from our eyes.

Then the lightnin's gash the heavens and the thun-
der jars the world

And the gray of fallin' water wraps the plains,
And 'cross the burnin's ranges, down the wind, the
word is whirled:

"Here's another year of livin', and the Rains!"

You've seen your fat fields ripplin' with the treasure
that they hoard;

Have you seen a mountain stretch and rub its
eyes?

Or bare hills lift their streamin' faces up and thank
the Lord,

Fairly tremblin' with their gladness and surprise?

Have you heard the 'royos singin' and the new
breeze hummin' gay,

As the greenin' ranges shed their dusty stains—
Just a whole dead world sprung back to life and
laughin' in a day!

Did you ever see the comin' of the Rains?

THE BORDER

When the dreamers of old Coronado,
From the hills where the heat ripples run,
Made a dust to the far Colorado
And wagged their steel caps in the sun,
They prayed like the saint and the martyr
And swore like the devils below,
For a man is both angel and Tartar
In the land where the dry rivers flow.

Ay, the Border, the sun smitten Border,
That fences the Land of the Free,
Where the desert glares grim like a warder
And the Rio gleams on to the sea;
Where ruins, like dreamy old sages,
Hint tales of dead empires and ages,
Where a young race is rearing the stages
Of ambitious empires to be.

Came the padres to soften the savage
And show him the heavenly goal;
Came Spaniards to piously ravage
And winnow his flesh from his soul;
Then miner and riotous herder,
Over-riding white breed of the North,
Brought progress, and new sorts of murder,
And a kind of perpetual Fourth.

Ay, the Border, the whimsical Border,
Deep purples and dazzling gold,
Soft hearts full of mirthful disorder,
Hard faces, sun wrinkled and old,
Warm kisses 'neath patio roses,
Cold lead as the luck-god disposes,
Clean valor fame never discloses,
Black trespasses laughingly told!

Then out from the peaceful old places
Walked the Law, grave, strong and serene,
And the harsh elbow-rub of the races
Was padded, with writs in between.
Then stilled was the strife and the racket,
That neighborly love might advance—
With a knife in the sleeve of its jacket
And a gun in the band of its pants.

Ay, the Border, the bright, placid Border!
It sleeps, like a snake in the sun,
Like a "hole" tamped and primed in due order,
Like a shining and full throated gun.
But the dust-devil dances and staggers
And the yucca flower daintily swaggers
At her birth from a cluster of daggers,
And ever the heat ripples run.

Fierce, hot, is the Border's bright daytime,
Calm, sweet, the vast night on its plains;
White hell on the mesas, its Maytime,
A green-and-gold heaven, its Rains.
It is grimmer than slumber's dark brother,
'Tis as gay as the mocking-bird likes;
It loves like a lioness mother
And strikes as the rattlesnake strikes.

Ay, the Border, bewildering Border,
Our youngest, and oldest, domains,
Where the face of the Angel Recorder
Knits hard between chuckles and pains,
Vast peace, the clear sky's earthly double,
Witch cauldron forever a-bubble,
Home of mystery, splendor and trouble
And a people with sun in their veins.

THE BAD LANDS

No fresh green things in the Bad Lands bide;
It is all stark red and gray,
And strewn with bones that had lived and died
Ere the first man saw the day.
When the sharp crests dream in the sunset gleam
And the bat through the canyon veers,
You will sometimes catch, if you listen long,
The tones of the Bad Lands' mystic song,
A song of a million years.

The place is as dry as a crater cup,
Yet you hear, as the stars shine free,
From the barren gulches sounding up,
The lap of a spawning sea,
A breeze that cries where the great ferns rise
From the pools on a new-made shore,
With the whip and whirl of batlike wings
And the snarl of slimy, fighting things
And the tread of the dinosaur.

Then the sea voice ebbs through untold morns,
And the jungle voices reign—
The hunting howl and the clash of horns
And the screech of rage and pain.

Harsh and grim is the old earth hymn
In that far brute paradise,
And as ages drift the rough strains fall
To a single note more grim than all,
The crack of the glacial ice.

So the song runs on, with shift and change,
Through the years that have no name,
And the late notes soar to a higher range,
But the theme is still the same.
Man's battle-cry and the guns' reply
Blend in with the old, old rhyme
That was traced in the score of the strata marks
While millenniums winked like campfire sparks
Down the winds of unguessed time.

There's a finer fight than of tooth and claw,
More clean than of blade and gun,
But, fair or foul, by the Great Bard's law
'Twill be fight till the song is done.
Not mine to sigh for the song's deep "why,"
Which only the Great Bard hears.
My soul steps out to the martial swing
Of the brave old song that the Bad Lands sing,
The song of a million years.



*No fresh green things in the Bad Lands bide;
It is all stark red and gray,*

*And stream with bones that had lived and died
Ere the first man saw the day.*

THE SPRINGTIME PLAINS

Heart of me, are you hearing
The drum of hoofs in the rains?
Over the Springtime plains I ride
Knee to knee with Spring
And glad as the summering sun that comes
Galloping north through the zodiac!
Heart of me, let's forget
The plains death white and still,
When lonely love through the stillness called
Like a smothered stream that sings of Summer
Under the snow on a Winter night.
Now the frost is blown from the sky
And the plains are living again.
Lark lovers sing on the sunrise trail,
Wild horses call to me out of the noon,
Watching me pass with impish eyes,
Gray coyotes laugh in the quiet dusk
And the plains are glad all day with me.
Heart of me, all the way
My heart and the hoofs keep time,
And the wide, sweet winds from the greening world
Shout in my ears a glory song,
For nearer, nearer, mile and mile,
Over the quivering rim of the plains,
Is the valley that Spring and I love best
And the waiting eyes of you!

ON THE OREGON TRAIL

We're the prairie pilgrim crew,
Sailin' with the sun,
Lookin' West to meet a great reward,
Trailin' toward a land that's new
Like our fathers done,
Trustin' in our rifles and the Lord.

A-ll set! Go ahead!
Out the prairie trail.
Leave the woods and settlements behind.
Trail and settle, work and fight
Till the rollin' earth is white,—
That's the law and gospel of our kind.

Desert suns and throats o' dust,
But we never stop;
Wimmin-folks are knittin' as they ride.
We're a breed that, when we must,
Fight until we drop,
But our work and git-thar is our pride.

A-ll set! Go ahead!
Up the sandy Platte.
Leave the circle smokin' in the dawn,
So the comin' hosts will know,
'Mongst the trails of buffalo
Where their darin' brother whites have gone.

Night so black 'twould blind a fox,
Yells and feathered sleet,
Aim the best you kin and trust to luck.
Arrows whang the wagon box
But all hell kaint beat
Rifles from Missouri and Kentuck.

A-ll set! Go ahead!
Leave the dead to sleep
Till the desert sees the Judgment Day.
Mourn the good boys laid so low,
But we'll mourn them on the go—
Pawnee! Ogalalla! Cl'ar the way!

Far across the glarin' plain
See the mountain peaks
Glimmer 'long the edge like flecks o' foam.
Shove! you oxen, till your chain
Stretches out and squeaks;
Somewhere out beyond that range is *Home!*

A-ll set! Go ahead!
Trailin' toward the West
Till the sunset's shinin' flag is furled.
Ay, our flag's the Western skies,
Flag that drew our fathers' eyes,
Flag that leads the white man 'round the world.

THE FOREST RANGERS

Red is the arch of the nightmare sky,
Red are the mountains beneath,
Bright where a million red imps leap high,
Dancing and snapping their teeth.

A keen fight! a clean fight!
Shoulder your shovels and follow
Up, while they stop in the pines at the top,
Shooting their sparks in showers.
Up, with your hats ducking under the smoke of it,
Next to the scorch of it, into the choke of it!
Fight for the ranch in the hollow.
Fight! for it is not ours.

Why are we fighting from dark to day,
From summit to canyon wall?
Twice for the Service, and once the pay—
Most, the hot fun of it all!

A stand fight! a grand fight!
Into the smother we wallow,
Stopping their march where the ridge pines parch
Over the shriveling flowers.
Stick! with the smoke steaming out of the coats
of you,
Sweat in the eyes of you, fire in the throats of you!
Fight for the ranch in the hollow.
Fight! for it is not ours.

THE YELLOW STUFF

By the rim rocks on the hill
The canyon side is rifted
Where Grasping Gabe, with pick and drill,
Once mucked and shot and drifted.
His hairy arms were never still;
His eyes were never lifted.

The yellow stuff! The yellow stuff!
All day his steel would tinkle
And when the blast roared out at last
He scanned each rocky wrinkle.
That tunnel's face was life to him,
And joy and kids and wife to him
Its thread of yellow twinkle.

By the rim rocks where he wrought
A wall that looked eternal
Caved in one day and Gabe was caught
Snug as a walnut kernel,
Shut up with hunger, thirst and thought
In dark that was infernal.

The yellow stuff! The yellow stuff!
Then Gabe forgot its uses,
And all the gold the hills could hold
Looked like a pair of deuces.
No joy was dust and ore to him;
The gold outside was more to him
That slanted through the spruces.

By the rim rocks, far away
From helpers or beholders,
Gabe worked a lifetime in a day,
Then shoved out head and shoulders
And cried and kissed the light that lay
Upon the sunny boulders.

The yellow stuff! The yellow stuff!
He blessed the sunset shining,
To high in grade to be assayed
And pure beyond refining.
What scum his work had doled to him,
When God would give such gold to him
Without a lick of mining!

THE SHEEP-HERDER

All day across the sagebrush flat
Beneath the sun of June,
My sheep they loaf and feed and blat
Their never changin' tune.
And then at night time, when they lay
As quiet as a stone,
I hear the gray wolf far away;
"Alo-one!" he says, "Alo-one!"

A-a! m-a! ba-a! eh-eh-eh!
The tune the woollies sing;
It's rasped my ears, it seems, for years,
Though really just since spring;
And nothin', far as I kin see
Around the circle's sweep,
But sky and plains, my dreams and me
And them infernal sheep.

I've got one book—it's poetry—
A bunch of pretty wrongs
An Eastern lunger gave to me;
He said 'twas "shepherd songs."
But though that poet sure is deep
And has sweet things to say,
He never seen a herd of sheep,
Or smelt them, anyway.

A-a! ma-a! ba-a! eh-eh-eh!
My woollies greasy gray,
An awful change has hit the range
Since that old poet's day.
For you're just silly, on'ry brutes
And I look like distress
And my pipe ain't the kind that toots
And there's no "shepherdess."

Yet 'way down home in Kansas State,
Bliss Township, Section Five,
There's one that promised me to wait,
The sweetest girl alive.
That's why I salt my wages down
And mend my clothes with strings,
While others blow their pay in town
For booze and other things.

A-a! ma-a! ba-a! eh-eh-eh!
My Minnie, don't be sad;
Next year we'll lease that splendid piece
That corners on your dad.
We'll drive to "literary," dear,
The way we used to do
And turn my lonesome workin' here
To happiness for you.



A-a! ma-a! ba-a! eh-eh-eh!
My woollies greasy gray.



Suppose, down near that rattlers' den,
While I sit here and dream,
I'd see a bunch of ugly men
And hear a woman scream.
Suppose I'd let my rifle shout
And drop the men in rows,
And then the woman should turn out—
My Minnie!—just suppose.

A-a! m-a! ba-a! eh-eh-eh!
The tune would then be gay;
There is, I mind, a parson kind
Just forty miles away.
Why Eden would come back again
With sage and sheep corrals,
And I could swing a singin' pen
To write her "pastorals."

I pack a rifle on my arm
And jump at flies that buzz;
There's nothin' here to do me harm
I sometimes wish there was.
If through that brush above the pool
A red should creep—and creep—
Wah! cut down on 'im! Stop, you fool!
That's nothin' but a sheep.

A-a! ma-a! ba-a!—Hell!

Oh, sky and plain and bluff!

Unless my mail comes up the trail

I'm locoed, sure enough.

What's that?—a dust-whiff near the butte

Right where my last trail ran,

A movin' speck, a—*wagon*! Hoot!

Thank God! here comes a man.

THE OLD PROSPECTOR

There's a song in the canyon below me
And a song in the pines overhead,
As the sunlight crawls down from the snow-line
And rustles the deer from his bed.
With mountains of green all around me
And mountains of white up above
And mountains of blue down the sky-line,
I follow the trail that I love.

My hands they are hard from the shovel,
My leg is rheumatic by streaks
And my face it is wrinkled from squintin'
At the glint of the sun on the peaks.
You pity the prospector sometimes
As if he was out of your grade.
Why, you are all prospectors, bless you!
I'm only a branch of the trade.

You prospect for wealth and for wisdom,
You prospect for love and for fame;
Our work don't just match as to details,
But the principle's mostly the same.
While I swing a pick in the mountains
You slave in the dust and the heat
And scratch with your pens for a color
And assay the float of the street.



You wail that your wisdom is salted,
That fame never pays for the mill,
That wealth hasn't half enough value
To pay you for climbin' the hill.
You even say love's El Dorado,
A pipedream that never endures—
Well, my luck ain't all that I want it,
But I never envied you yours.

You're welcome to what the town gives you,
To prizes of laurel and rose,
But leave me the song in the pine tops,
The breath of a wind from the snows.
With mountains of green all around me
And mountains of white up above
And mountains of blue down the sky-line,
I'll follow the trail that I love.

GOD OF THE OPEN

God of the open, though I am so simple
Out in the wind I can travel with you,
Noons when the hot mesas ripple and dimple,
Nights when the stars glitter cool in the blue.
Too far you stand for the reach of my hand,
Yet I can feel your big heart as it beats
Friendly and warm in the sun or the storm.
Are you the same as the God of the streets?

Yours is the sunny blue roof I ride under;
Mountain and plain are the house you have made.
Sometimes it roars with the wind and the thunder
But in your house I am never afraid.
He? Oh, they give him the license to live,
Aim, in their ledgers, to pay him his due,
Gather by herds to present him with words—
Words! What are words when my heart talks
with you?

God of the open, forgive an old ranger
Penned among walls where he never sees through.
Well do I know, though their God seems a stranger,
Earth has no room for another like you.
Shut out the roll of the wheels from my soul;
Send me a wind that is singing and sweet
Into this place where the smoke dims your face.
Help me see you in the God of the street.

THE PASSING OF THE TRAIL

There was a sunny, savage land
 Beneath the eagle's wings,
And there, across the thorns and sand,
 Wild rovers rode as kings.
Is it a yarn from long ago
 And far across the sea?
Could that land be the land we know?
 Those roving riders we?

The trail's a lane, the trail's a lane.
 How comes it, pard of mine?
Within a day it slipped away
 And hardly left a sign.
Now history a tale has gained
 To please the younger ears—
A race of kings that rose, and reigned,
 And passed in fifty years!

Dream back beyond the cramping lanes
 To glories that have been—
The camp smoke on the sunset plains,
 The riders loping in:
Loose rein and rowelled heel to spare,
 The wind our only guide,
For youth was in the saddle there
 With half a world to ride.

The trail's a lane, the trail's a lane.
Dead is the branding fire.
The prairies wild are tame and mild,
All close-corralled with wire.
The sunburnt demigods who ranged
And laughed and lived so free
Have topped the last divide, or changed
To men like you and me.

Where, in the valley fields and fruits,
Now hums a lively street,
We milled a mob of fighting brutes
Among the grim mesquit.
It looks a far and fearful way—
The trail from Now to Then—
But time is telescoped to-day,
A hundred years in ten.

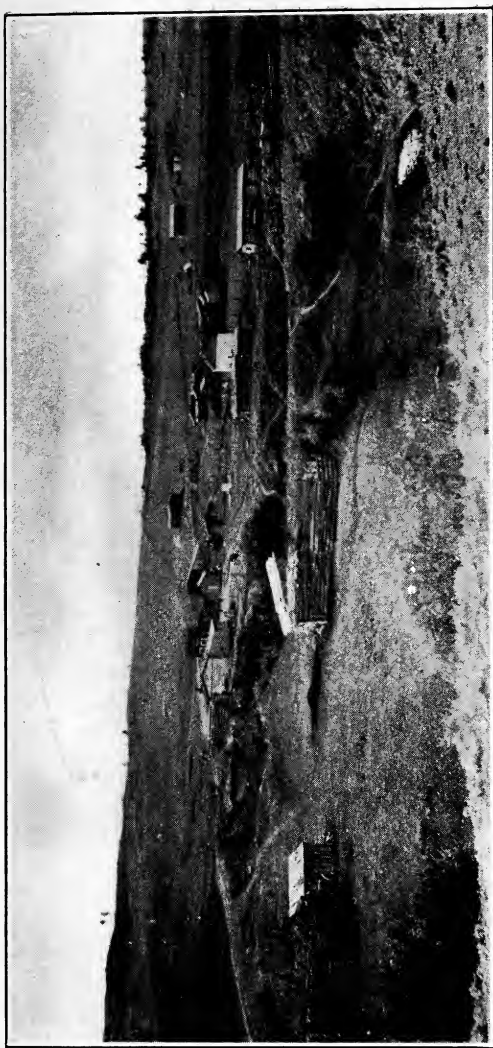
The trail's a lane, the trail's a lane.
Our brows are scarcely seamed,
But we may scan a mighty span
Methuselah ne'er dreamed.
Yet, pardner, we are dull and old,
With paltry hopes and fears,
Beside those rovers gay and bold
Far riding down the years!

LATIGO TOWN

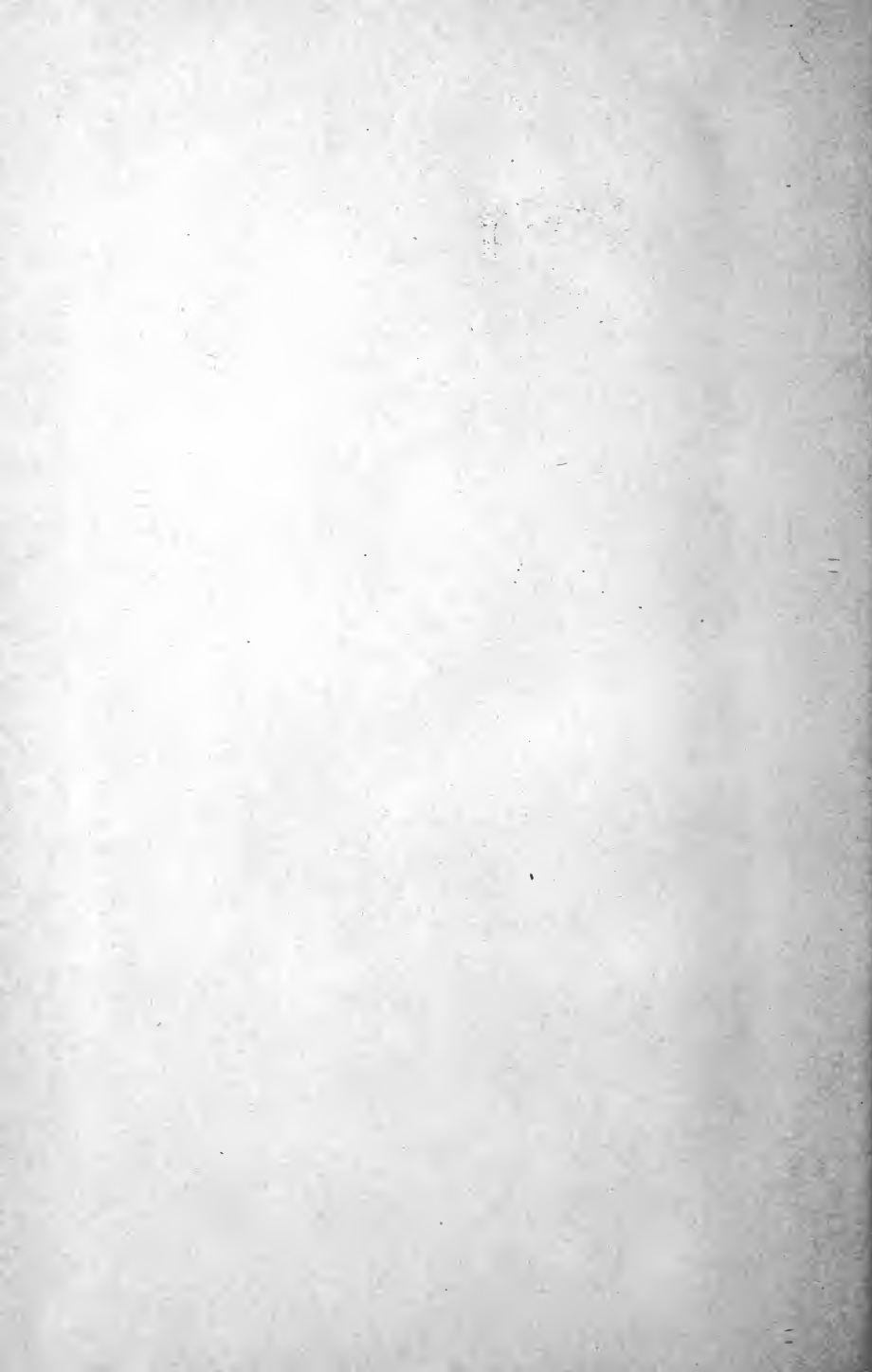
You and I settled this section together;
Youthful and mettled and wild were we then.
You were the gladdest town out in the weather;
I was the maddest young scamp among men.
Latigo Town, ay, Latigo Town,
Child of the mesa sun-flooded and brown,
That hour of gracious romance and good leather,
Splendid, audacious, comes never again.

Many a rover as brash as a sparrow,
Loping in over the amethyst plains,
Reined for your spinning roulette and your faro,
Light-hearted sinning and fiddled refrains.
Latigo Town, ay, Latigo Town,
We made a past you are still living down,
Keen for a tussle, with salt in our marrow,
Steel in our muscles and sun in our veins!

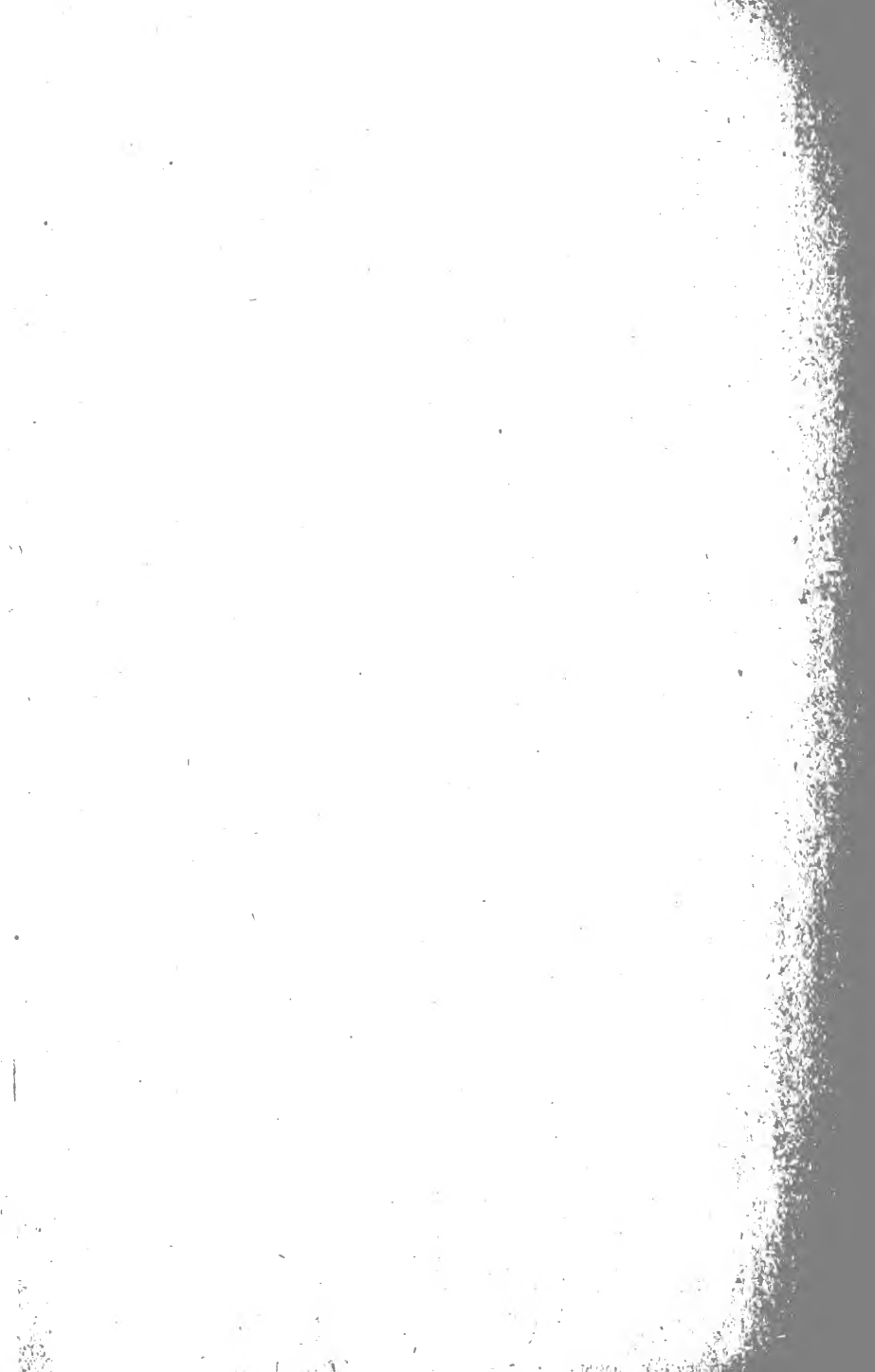
Rowels that jingled and rigs that were tattered,
Yet how we tingled to dreams that were high!
Slim was the treasure we gathered and scattered,
But can you measure the wind and the sky?
Latigo Town, ay, Latigo Town,
Freedom and youth were a robe and a crown.
Then we were bosses of riches that mattered,
Laughing at losses of things you can buy.

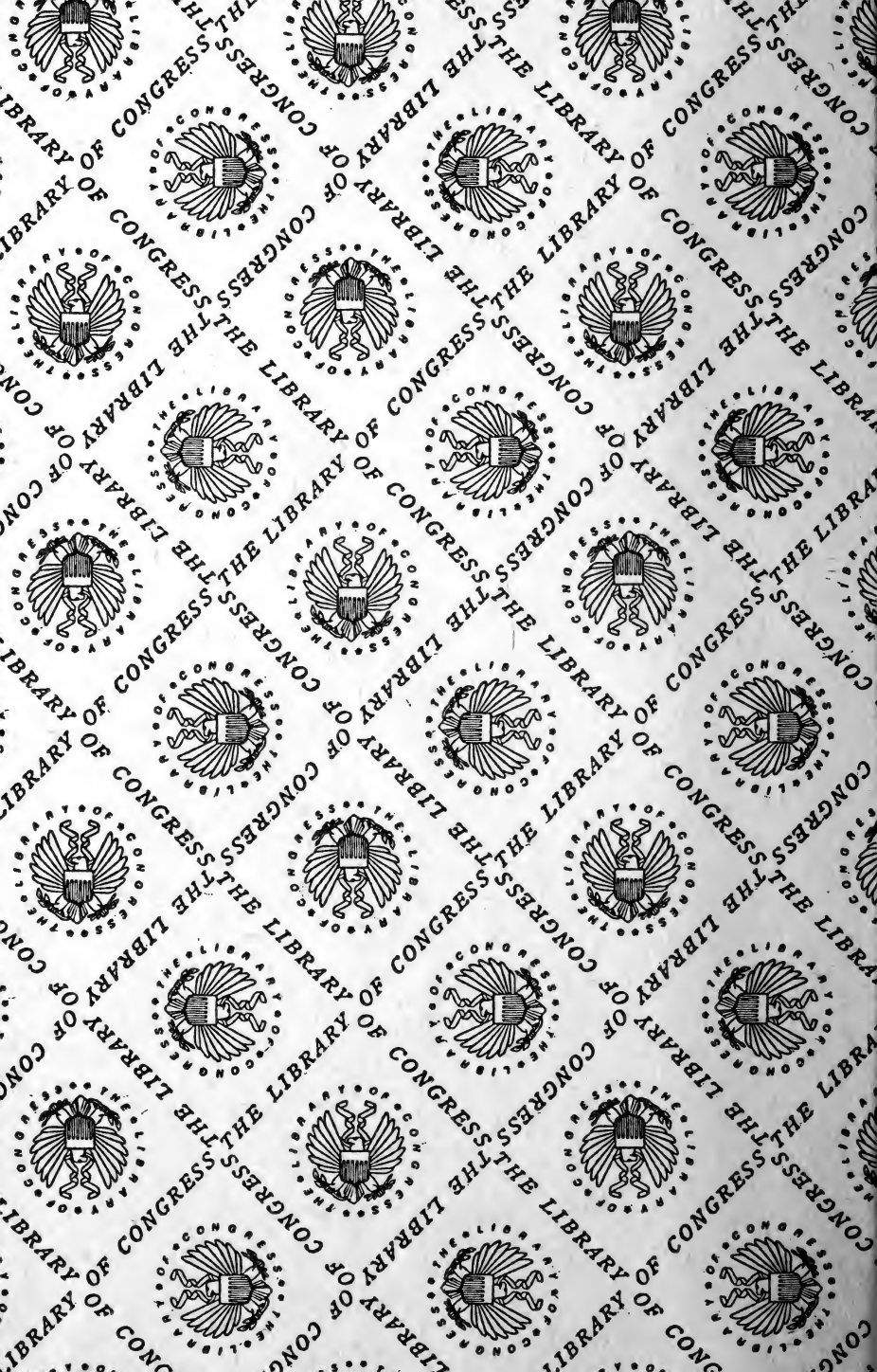


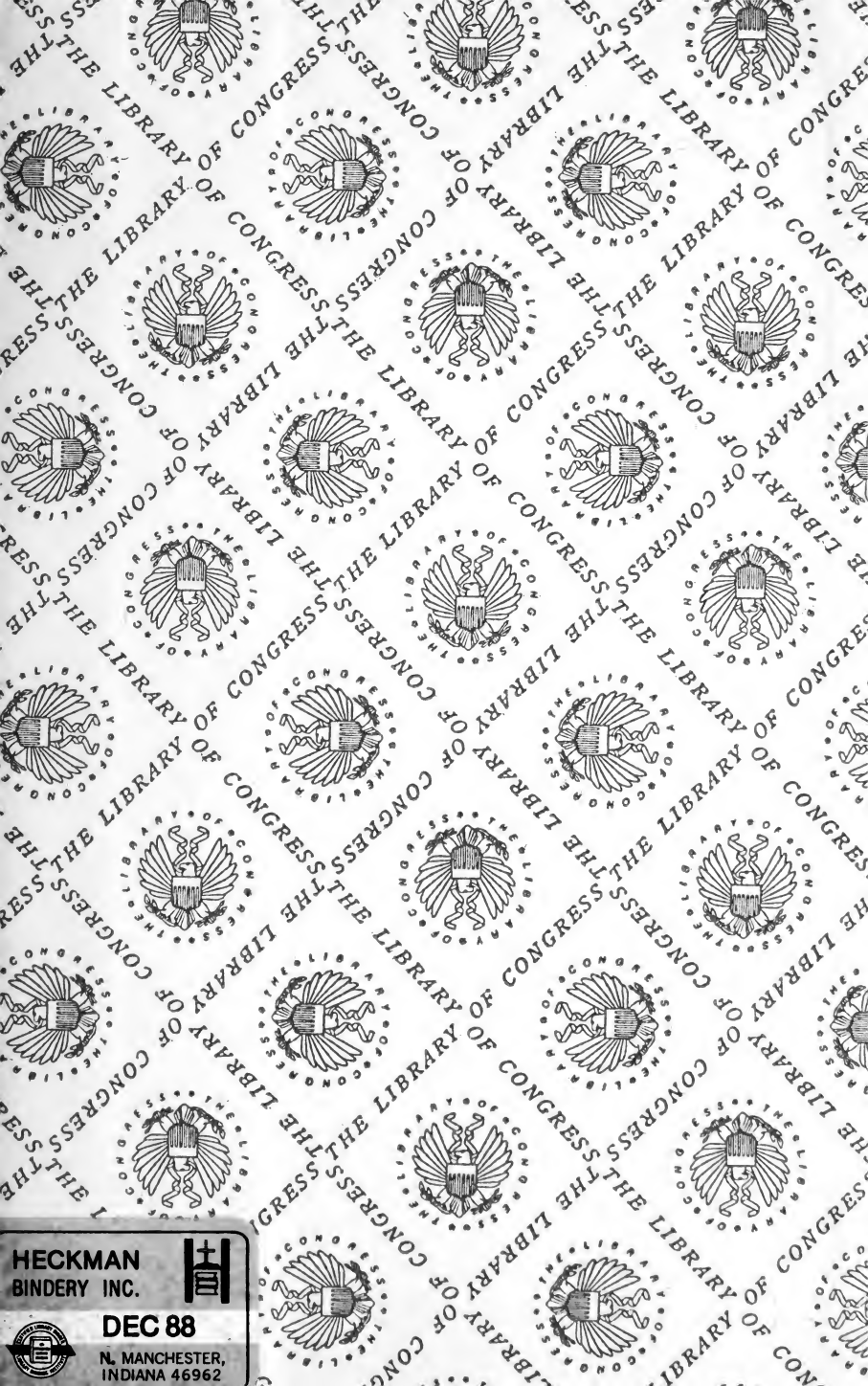
*Latigo Town, ay, Latigo Town,
Child of the mesa sun-flooded and brown.*



Town that was fiery and careless and Spanish,
Boy that was wiry and wayward and glad—
Over the border to limbo they vanish;
Progress and order decreed they were bad.
Latigo Town, ay, Latigo Town,
Pursy with culture and civic renown,
Never censorious progress can banish
Dreams of the glorious youth that we had!







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